

Report

Fort Caroline National Memorial

■ 1.0 Site Description

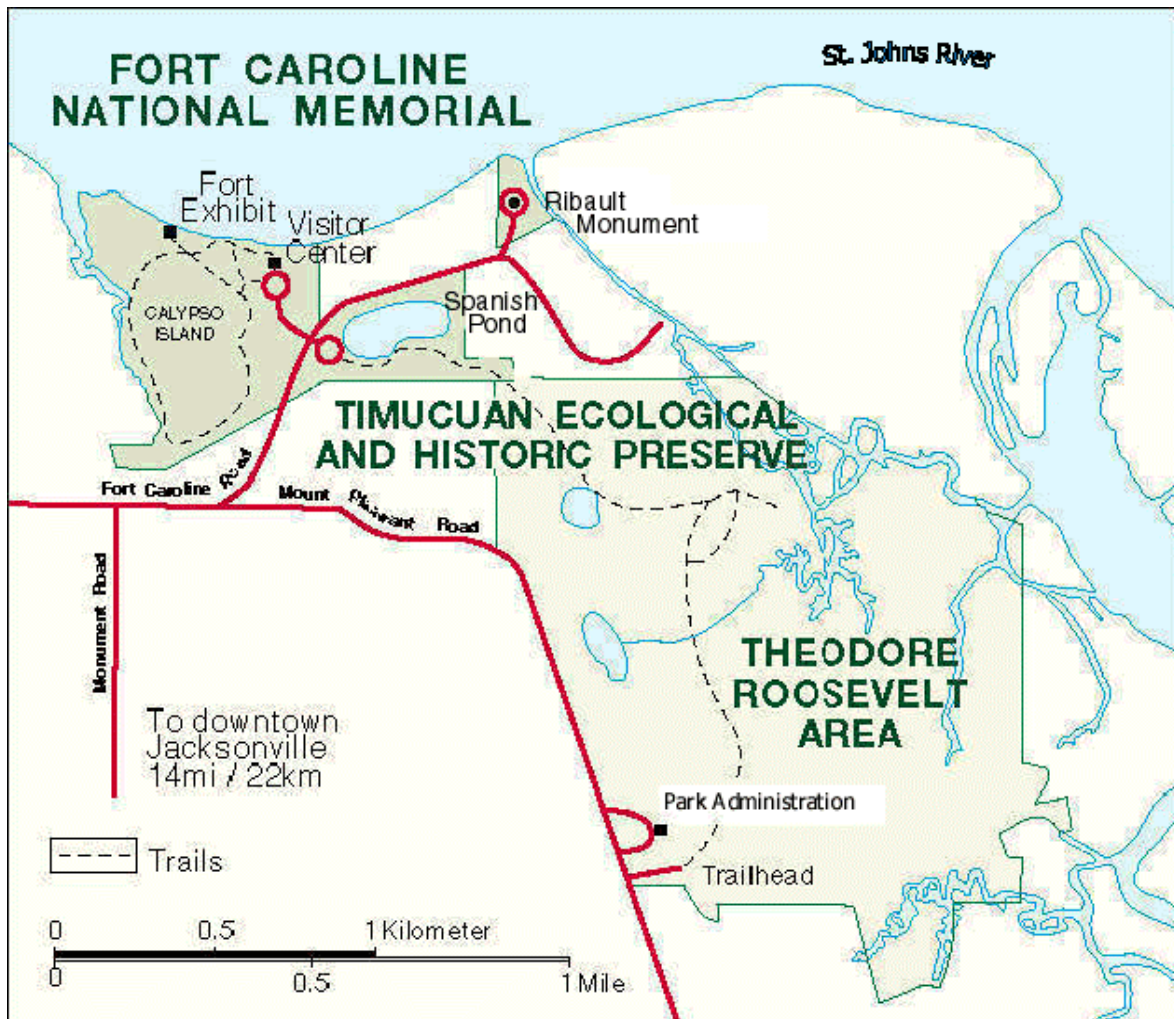


View of Death Valley

Fort Caroline National Memorial (Memorial), a unit of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, is located in the eastern end of Jacksonville, Florida at Fort Caroline Road (see Figure 1). It became part of the NPS in 1950 to commemorate the historic 16th century colony, *la Caroline*. Nestled between northeast Florida's lower St. Johns and Nassau Rivers, the 46,000-acre Preserve was established in 1988 to protect one of the last unspoiled coastal wetlands on the Atlantic Coast and to preserve historic and prehistoric sites within the area. Approximately 75 percent of the Preserve's 46,000 acres are open water or salt marsh. The NPS currently owns about 7,500 acres with the remainder of Preserve lands owned by State, Federal, and Local government agencies, private individuals, and corporations.

Fort Caroline occupies approximately 138 acres. The main access route is Route 9A via Merrill Road to Fort Caroline Road. With the exception of rush-hour traffic at the Route 9A and Merrill Road junction, the main access roads immediate to the Memorial are rarely congested. There are two main parking areas including the Visitor Center and the Spanish Pond. The Visitor Center has 12 spaces for passenger vehicles and two spaces for buses. The Spanish Pond parking area has eight parking spaces for cars and no bus parking. Features of the main site include:

Figure 1. Location of Fort Caroline National Memorial



- **Visitor Center** – A quarter-mile walk from the Visitor Center along the Old French Trail brings visitors to a life-size exhibit of Fort de la Caroline. In addition to the fort trail, there is a one-mile self-guided loop trail (Hammock Trail) with interpretive placards along the way that focus on the natural and cultural history of the site.
- **Spanish Pond** – A short walk or drive from the Visitor Center complex leads to the Spanish Pond area where visitors may view a freshwater wetland and its associated vegetation and wildlife. A network of trails connects the Spanish Pond site to the Theodore Roosevelt Area, a 600-acre coastal maritime hammock preserve of hardwood forest, scrub vegetation, and saltmarsh.
- **Ribault Monument** – A short drive from Spanish Pond brings the visitor to Ribault Monument, a replica of the stone column placed by Jean Ribault at the mouth of the St. Johns River in 1562. Ribault Monument is located on one of the highest portions of a bluff overlooking the St. Johns River. A wheelchair-accessible terrace offers visitors a scenic view of the river and wetlands to the northeast.

Visitation to the Memorial is highest in February and March. In 1998, approximately 129,300 persons visited the Memorial. It is open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The site is self-guiding, but NPS staff are available throughout the day to provide additional information. History and nature enjoyment are the most common uses of the Memorial site. Limited picnicking in the designated area is also available. A network of hiking trails provides access to the interior of the nearby Theodore Roosevelt area. The Preserve is a driving site where visitors can view different scenic areas and historic places along the Atlantic coast.

There are other proposals within the Preserve that could have a transportation impact on Fort Caroline. For example, there may potentially be the need for some form of shuttle bus service on the Fort George Island. A tram is being proposed on Fort George Loop Road with 16 to 20 passenger vehicles. A staging area is proposed on state park lands to increase parking capacity at the Kingsley Plantation. There are also plans to increase the boundary of the Preserve in the north into Nassau County to the Georgia border that can potentially double the Preserve's boundary. There are also proposals to expand and increase ferry service to different sites within the Preserve.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

With the exception of ferry service, there is no public transportation to the Memorial. A concessionaire operates a boat tour between the Memorial and the Kingsley Plantation. Interpretive programs are conducted on the tour. The Mayport Ferry provides transportation between Mayport, Fort George and the City of Jacksonville along the St. Johns River. A private concessionaire operates the service and charges \$2.50 per vehicle. The ferry service provides visitors a recreational opportunity to see the Preserve from the water. The Preserve is seeking funding to build larger and updated boat docks at Fort Caroline and Kingsley Plantation to provide improved ferry/boat access to these locations.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Based on recent visitation figures and the lack of immediate parking and major traffic congestion problems, there does not appear to be any short-term Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs at Fort Caroline. Visitors are expected to continue to drive to the Memorial. However, there may be a need to implement a long-term ATS strategy designed to link the Memorial and the Preserve if future visitation increases as anticipated. One possibility would be to provide a shuttle bus stop at the Memorial or ferry connection from other locations.

■ 4.0 Basis for ATS Needs

Future expansion of public transportation access to the Preserve would benefit access to the Memorial. Because Fort Caroline is part of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, any plans to improve public transportation and access would need to be implemented in the context of the entire Preserve, not just the Memorial. Nevertheless, providing a public transit stop (either through a shuttle or ferry service) at the Memorial would help improve visitor access and make Fort Caroline a destination within the Preserve.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve. *Final General Management Plan, Development Concept Plans, Environmental Impact Statement*. Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1995.

Fort Caroline National Memorial Web site (<http://www.nps.gov/foca/>).

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Barbara Goodman, superintendent, Fort Caroline National Memorial